

joining the feeding flocks in the crop field.

In conclusion, this study showed that in the range of group sizes considered, peafowl benefit from being in a flock, since peck rate and proportion of time spent in feeding in flocks were higher than those of solitary birds, and the individual time spent in vigilance decreased with flock size. However, the increase in feeding rate with flock size might not be linear and consistent. Peafowl flock in open habitat, and flocking seems to be adaptive, mainly with respect to high food availability and increased vigilance (Yasmin

1997). Nevertheless, foraging as a member of a group is more advantageous than feeding alone.

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#### 10. EGGS IN THE DIET OF THE SARUS CRANE *GRUS ANTIGONE* (LINN.)

The sarus crane (*Grus antigone*) is well known to be an omnivore, feeding on grain of several kinds, shoots of plants, bulbs of aquatic plants, frogs, lizards and other reptiles, grasshoppers and other insects, fish, vegetable matter, fruits, and aquatic and terrestrial molluscs (Hume and Marshall 1879, Law 1930, Baker 1929, Ghorpade 1975). I had the opportunity to observe a sarus family in Haryana which has

enabled me to make an addition to the known diet of the species.

On the morning of June 16, 1998, I was observing a pair of sarus cranes with a young chick foraging among the water hyacinth in the Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary, Haryana. The pair were characteristically keeping the chick between them as they moved around and occasionally, they would pick up a small crab

from among the water hyacinth and drop it in front of the chick. The male sarus suddenly reared its head and made a jabbing movement into the hyacinth with its open beak. It had chanced upon an incubating spotbill duck (*Anas poecilorhynchos*) which hurriedly took flight, calling loudly. The male began feeding on the eggs, and proceeded to swallow them one by one, lifting them, and raising its beak upwards. The female, meanwhile, herded the chick towards the nest and swallowed one egg. The male bird had swallowed four eggs continuously and a distinct bulge had formed at the top of the neck. The female then lifted one egg from the nest and dropped it on the ground near the chick and pecked at the egg to open it up for the chick to feed on. When the chick began feeding, the female moved towards the nest, broke open one egg and fed on the contents. The male regurgitated part of the eggs and the chick fed on this as well. The spotbill duck had, in the

meanwhile, made several unsuccessful attempts to drive away the cranes from the nest by flying close and calling out loudly. The three cranes ate at least nine eggs during this observation. They stayed at the nest for over two hours after eating and preened themselves.

Eggs have never been known to be in the diet of the sarus crane. The adult birds are, however, reputed to feed the chicks on the egg shells just after hatching (A. R. Rahmani *pers. comm.*). This behaviour has been observed in the sand-hill crane (*Grus canadensis*) where the adult offers pieces of the egg shell directly to the chicks, or drops the pieces in front of them (Archibald and Meine 1996).

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## 11. CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE OF BREEDING OF THE NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON *COLUMBA ELPHINSTONII* (SYKES) AT NANDI HILLS, NEAR BANGALORE

The Nilgiri wood pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* is known to occur in the Western Ghats complex including the Anamalais, Nilgiris, Palnis and the hills of western Mysore, where it affects moist evergreen forest from the foothills to the highest shola forests (Ali and Ripley 1983).

Outside this designated area, the Nilgiri wood pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* has been

reported at the Nandi hills (13° 22' N, 77° 41' E) about 60 km north of Bangalore (Subramanya *et al.* 1994).

I visited Nandi hills on March 23, 1997. While bird watching in a clearing adjoining an evergreen patch, the sound of a snapping twig drew my attention. A pigeon flew out of the dense canopy of the evergreen patch into the open. It